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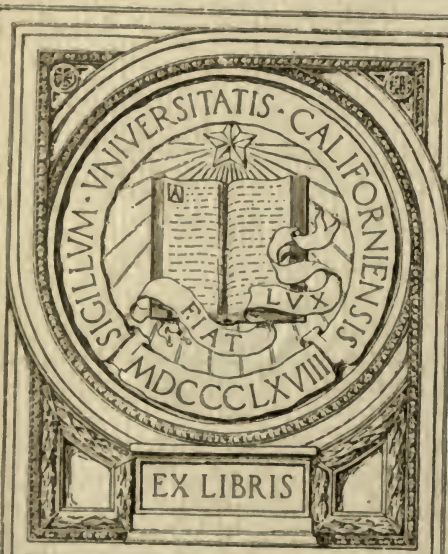
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The Little Lad of Bethlehem Town

By Emily Huntington Miller

"And there were in the same
country shepherds abiding
in the field, keeping watch
over their flocks by night."

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TO THE
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APPARITION TO THE SHEPHERDS

B. FLOCKHORST

*"It was she who said,
'Fear not,' and I looked up and
did not fear."*

The Little Lad of Bethlehem Town

Page 1

SCENE ONE

Night on the hills above Bethlehem. Three shepherds are in a group; a fourth sits apart, father of the little lad who sits near him with one arm around a shaggy sheep-dog. :: :: :: ::

COME closer, lad. I like to feel
you near.

FATHER

My little David—little motherless lamb—

But six tonight, and she a year in
heaven!

How near the stars are, father. Do,
you think

DAVID

My mother can look down and see
us here?

Perhaps—it may be so—I cannot
tell.

FATHER

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The Little Lad of Bethlehem Town

DAVID

And speak to us, because it is my birthday?

FATHER

I do not think so. She would surely speak

Seeing how sad we are with her away.

DAVID

What does she do in heaven?

FATHER

Praise God, and go His errands to and fro.

DAVID

O then she might perchance be sent this way,

And we could see her as she passed along.

Dost think my mother could forget to love us,

Having so many joys in God's great heaven?

FATHER

Not so! O never so! & yet the Rabbis Say it may be the soul goes back to God,

The Little Lad of Bethlehem Town

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As the drop to the ocean, when the clay
That held it crumbles to its native
dust.

My mother was not clay—

What then, dear lad?

I cannot tell. Some soft, sweet, shin-
ing stuff

That makes the flowers, and bird
songs, and the sunshine—

What are God's errands, father? Do
His angels

Feed the wild birds, and paint the
sunset clouds,

And lead the stars out in a shining
flock—

And shake the dew down on the grass
at night,

And fill the little brooks brim full
of rain

DAVID

FATHER

DAVID

The Little Lad of Bethlehem Town

For all the thirsty sheep to come and
drink?

FATHER

It might be so. We know they do
His will

But no eye sees them as they come
and go—

How light it grows! almost as if the
dawn

Already had begun—

DAVID

Look, father! See the glory in the
sky,

As if a door were opened into heaven!

O look! look!

The Little Lad of Bethlehem Town

Page 5

SCENE TWO

As the splendor deepens the shepherds fall on their faces and the lad stands gazing upward, silent, but not afraid. The voice cries, "Fear not," and tells of the wondrous birth, and the vision of angels sweeps by with the song of praise. The shepherds slowly rise and look at each other.

You heard it? you and you? and
saw the angels?
Surely no mortal eyes have
seen such things
Since Jacob slept at Bethel—
Or such a song rang out since first
the stars
Together sang above a new-born
world.
Come, let us go to Bethlehem, that
our eyes
May see ^{the} Hope of Israel, born today,
And spread the tidings.

FIRST
SHEPHERD

SECOND
SHEPHERD

The Little Lad of Bethlehem Town

FATHER

But here's the lad, my David—

FIRST
SHEPHERD

Leave him: he'll sleep; the dog will
guard him well.

DAVID

O father! take me with you—

FIRST
SHEPHERD

Or let him stay with Joseph in the lodge
Down by the olive garden.

DAVID

Father, dear! I will not hinder; I
will run so fast.

SECOND
SHEPHERD

We'll soon be back; nothing can
harm you, lad.

DAVID

Father, you promised. 'Twas my
birthday treat,
To watch all night upon the hills
with you.

FATHER

Well, come; and if you tire I'll
carry you.

You are no heavier than a yearling
lamb;

I've often borne one further.

The Little Lad of Bethlehem Town

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*(On the way—the lad in his father's
arms.)*

Father, I saw her. It was she who said,
“Fear not,” and I looked up and
did not fear.

DAVID

You said she went God's errands;
might it be

That she was sent to bring the little
Christ

Down to his mother in the Bethlehem
town?

Dear lad—

FATHER

She'd bear him well. Her hands are
strong and soft,

DAVID

And when she strokes your cheek, or
holds you close

Against her breast—

O David! hush, my lad; you break
my heart.

FATHER

The Little Lad of Bethlehem Town

SCENE THREE

In the stable: The shepherds kneeling in awe and wonder while one tells the story of the vision to Joseph. Mary, seeing the little lad's wistful face, puts out her hand and draws him close to her.

DAVID

There's such a little Christ—no
bigger than
The babe my mother took
with her to heaven.

Didst see the angel that brought the
little Christ?

That was my mother—for my father
says

She goes upon God's errands to and
fro.

I think she surely brought him, for
tonight

Upon the hills she came to tell us of
him.

The Little Lad of Bethlehem Town

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I saw her in a glory like the sun;
She said: "Fear not," and all the an-
gels sang.

Upon the hills?

MARY

Yes, where we watched the sheep.
You heard the angels, lad? What did
they sing?

DAVID

I cannot tell. I only saw my
mother,

MARY

And tried to keep her words fast in
my heart.

DAVID

She said, "Good tidings of great joy,"
and then

She smiled at me, the way she used to
smile

When she had kissed me in my bed at
night,

And I would shut my eyes so I might
think

The Little Lad of Bethlehem Town

She was still there, close by me in the dark.

MARY

'Tis not so strange. I, too, have seen an angel;

He spoke to me, and told me wondrous things.

DAVID

May I touch him, the little baby Christ?

MARY

Yes, kiss his hand; see how the tiny fingers

Cling around mine, like little perching birds.

So dear—so sweet—and yet my very own—

Almost I wish that he were born like you

A shepherd lad, to lead the harmless sheep,

So I might fold him in my arms & smile

The Little Lad of Bethlehem Town

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Without a thought of Herod. Now
my fear,
An icy wind, blows through my new-
born joy
And chills it to the death, and makes
me tremble.

Yet God is strong—I will not be
afraid—

Sleep on, my little son. He'll keep
you safe,
He'll give His angels charge con-
cerning you.

*(Mary draws the babe to her bosom
and sings to him softly.)*

My soul doth magnify the Lord, for
behold from henceforth all gener-
ations shall call me blessed—

(The shepherds go out in silence.)

The Little Lad of Bethlehem Town

SCENE FOUR

The shepherds linger a little in the courtyard of the inn, where groups of people are encamped and a fire burning. David, holding his father's hand, looks at the strange night-scene with wondering eyes.

FATHER

THE dawn is near; we should be
on our way.
The sheep will soon be calling
from the fold.

FIRST
SHEPHERD

The sheep! Well, let them call,—
there's higher work
For us tonight than watching by a
sheep-fold.

THIRD
SHEPHERD
(An older
man)

We must go spread the tidings of the
Christ.
The town is full, and both the inns
o'erflowing,
And Roman soldiers here to speed
the taxing.

The Little Lad of Bethlehem Town

Page 13

If word were sent to Herod ^{that} a King
Was born to Israel, and the Bethle-
hem town

In a wild tumult, needs no prophet's
tongue

To say what would befall. Let us go
homeward,

And praise God as we go.

Aye, you are wise.

FATHER

God set me to keep sheep, but oft at
night

I speak with Him, as once King
David did,

A little shepherd lad on these same
hills.

I think He cares for all weak, help-
less things

His hand has made, and so I must
believe

The Little Lad of Bethlehem Town

THIRD
SHEPHERD
(musing)

That I can please Him best by doing
well

The work He gave me, while I sing
His praise.

A babe—a babe—and I am nigh
fourscore.

When he is grown I shall sleep with
my fathers,

And shall not see his triumph, if in-
deed

This be the Hope of Israel, the
Messiah.

Well—God be praised for what my
eyes have seen.

*(Shepherds sing as they go a temple-
song: Psalm 72.)*

He shall have dominion also from
sea to sea, and from the river un-
to the ends of the earth.

The Little Lad of Bethlehem Town

Page 15

Yea, all kings shall fall down before him: all nations shall serve him. His name shall endure for ever: his name shall be continued as long as the sun: and men shall be blessed in him: all nations shall call him blessed.

Blessed be the Lord God, the God of Israel, who only doeth wondrous things.

And blessed be his glorious name for ever: and let the whole earth be filled with his glory—

“All nations,” that is what the angel said—

“Good tidings to all people,” and
“great joy,”

And then she smiled, and went again to God.

DAVID
(half asleep
murmurs)

Here endeth THE LITTLE LAD
OF BETHLEHEM TOWN, being one
more story of that miraculous
time when a star shone to mark
the way to a stable. Told by
Emily Huntington Miller, who
is already known as the writer
of *From Avalon, For the Beloved,*
Songs from the West, An Eastern
Vision and others. Illustrated from
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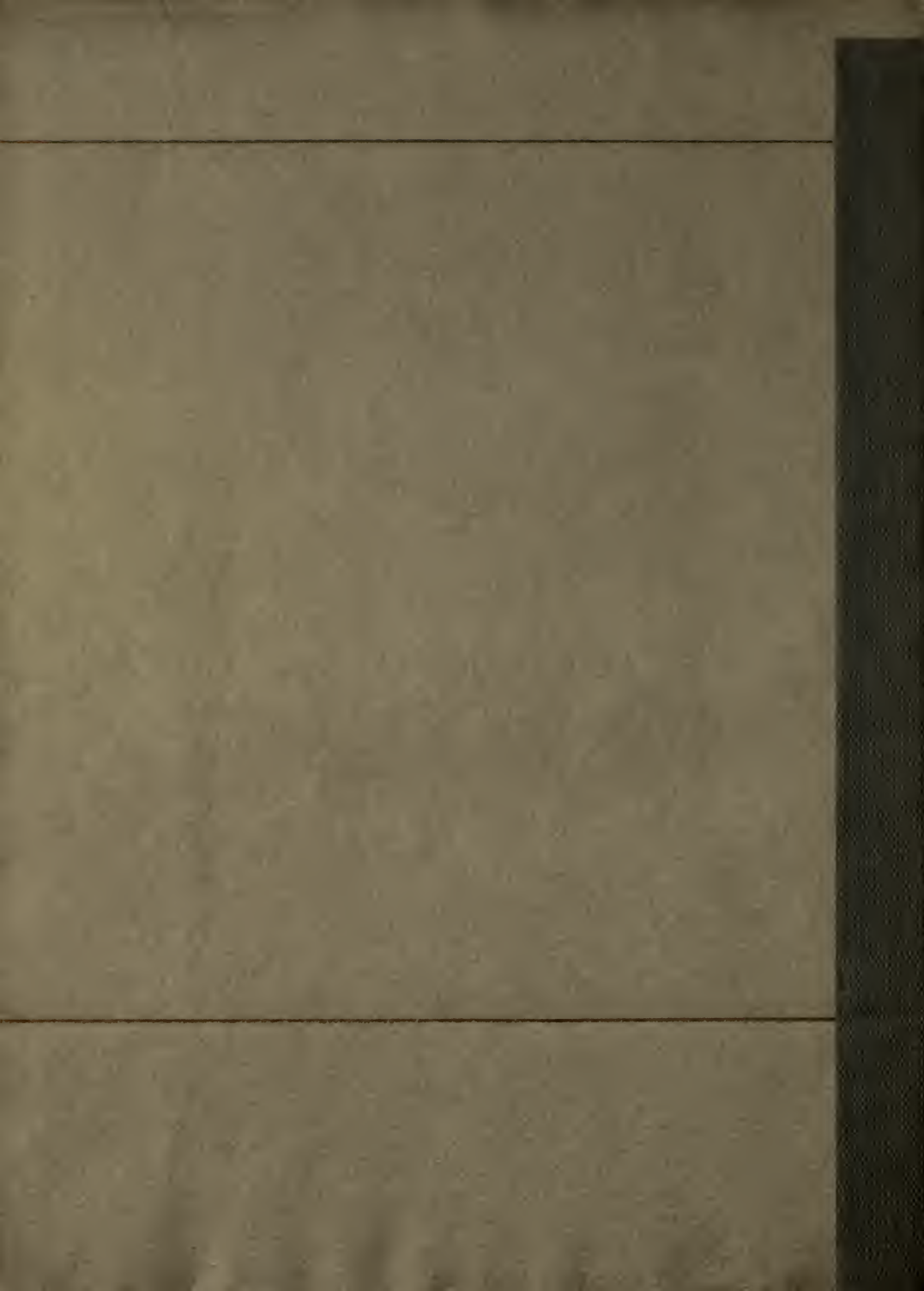
*"Almost I wish that
he were born like you a
shepherd lad, to lead
the harmless
sheep."*



CALIFORNIA

H. LEROLLE

THE ARRIVAL OF THE SHEPHERDS



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